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## The Marshes of Glynn (1989 Conference Materials)

Sidney Lanier

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# THE MARSHES OF GLYNN

SIDNEY LANIER, 1842 - 1881

Glooms of the live oaks, beautiful-braided and woven  
With intricate shades of the vines that myriad-cloven  
Clamber the forks of the multiform bough,—  
Emerald twilights,—  
Virginal shy lights,

Wrought of the leaves to allure to the whisper of vows,  
When lovers pace timidly down through the green cat-  
anodes

Of the dim sweet woods, of the dear dark woods,  
Of the heavenly woods and glades,  
That run to the radiant marginal sand-beach within  
The wide sea-marshes of Glynn,—

Beautiful glooms, soft dusks in the noon-day fire,—  
Wildwood privacies, closets of lone desire,  
Chamber from chamber parted with wavering arras of  
leaves,—

Cells for the passionate pleasure of prayer to the soul  
that grieves,  
Pure with a sense of the passing of saints through the  
wood,

Cool for the dutiful weighing of ill with good;—

O braided dusks of the oak and woven shades of the vine  
While the riotous noon-day sun of the June-day long did  
shine

Ye held me fast in your heart and I held you fast in mine,  
But now when the noon is no more, and riot is rest,  
And the sun is a-wait at the ponderous gate of the West,  
And the slant yellow beam down the wood-aisle doth  
seem

Like a lane into heaven that leads from a dream,—  
Aye, now, when my soul all day hath drunken the soul  
of the oak,

And my heart is at ease from men, and the wearisome  
sound of the stroke

Of the scythe of time and the trowel of trade is low,  
And belief overmasters doubt, and I know that I know,  
And my spirit is grown to a lordly great compass within,  
That the length and the breadth and the sweep of the  
marshes of Glynn

Will work me no fear like the fear they have wrought  
me of yore

When length was fatigue, and when breadth was but  
bitterness sore,

And when terror and shrinking and dreary unnamable  
pain

Drew over me out of the merciless miles of the plain,—

Oh, now, unafraid, I am fain to face

The vast sweet visage of space.

To the edge of the wood I am drawn, I am drawn,  
Where the gray beach glimmering runs, as a belt of the  
dawn,

For a mete and a mark

To the forest-dark:—

So:

Affable live-oak, leaning low,—

Thus—with your favor—soft, with a reverent hand,  
(Not lightly touching your person, Lord of the land!)  
Bending your beauty aside, with a step I stand  
On the firm-pocked sand,

Free

By a world of marsh that borders a world of sea.

Sinuous southward and sinuous northward the shim-  
mering band

Of the sand-beach fastens the fringe of the marsh to  
the folds of the land.

Inward and outward to northward and southward the  
beach-lines linger and curl

As a silver-wrought garment that clings to and follows  
the firm sweet limbs of a girl

Vanishing, swerving, evermore curving again into sight,  
Softly the sand-beach wavers away to a dim-gray  
looping of light.

And what is behind me to westward the wall of the  
woods stands high?

The world lies east: how ample, the marsh and the sea  
and the sky!

A league and a league of marsh-grass, waist-high,  
broad in the blade,

Green, and all of a height, and unflecked with a light or  
a shade,

Stretch leisurely off, in a pleasant plain,  
To the terminal blue of the main.

Oh, what is abroad in the marsh and the terminal sea?

Somehow my soul seems suddenly free

From the weighing of fate and sad discussion of sin,  
By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the  
marshes of Glynn.

Ye marshes, how candid and simple and nothing-with-  
holding and free

Ye publish yourself to the sky and offer yourselves to the  
sea!

Tolerant plains, that suffer the sea and the rains and the  
sun,

Ye spread and span like the catholic man who hath  
mightily won

God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain  
And sight out of blindness and purity out of a stain.

As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,  
Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God:

I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies  
In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh

and the skies;

By so many roots as the marsh-grass sends in the sod  
I will heartily lay me a-hold on the greatness of God:

Oh, like to the greatness of God is the greatness within  
The range of the marshes, the liberal marshes of Glynn.

And the sea lends large, as the marsh; lo, out of his  
plenty the sea

Pours fast: full soon the time of the flood-tide must be;  
Look how the grace of the sea doth go  
About and about through the intricate channels that flow  
Here and there,

Everywhere,

Till his waters has flooded the uttermost creeks and the  
low-lying lanes,

And the marsh is meshed with a million veins,  
That like as with rosy and silvery essences flow  
In the rose-and-silver evening glow.

Farewell, my lord Sun!

The creeks overflow: a thousand rivulets run  
'Twixt the roots of the sod; the blades of the marsh-  
grass stir;

Passeth a hurrying sound of wings that westward whirr,  
Passeth, and all is still; and the currents cease to run,  
And the sea and the marsh are one.

How still the plains of the waters be!

The tide is in his ecstasy.

The tide is at his highest height:  
And it is night.

And now from the Vast of the Lord will the waters of  
sleep

Roll in on the souls of men,

But who will reveal to our waking ken

The forms that swim and the shapes that creep

Under the waters of sleep?

And I would I could know what swimmeth below when  
the tide comes in

On the length and the breadth of the marvelous marshes  
of Glynn.

